"The Right Sort to Bring to the City": Jack Johnson, Boxing, and Boosterism in Salt Lake City

BY RICHARD IAN KIMBALL

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Jack Johnson (March 31, 1878–June 10, 1946.)

On July 4, 1910, the most important heavyweight championship fight in American history pitted black heavyweight champion Jack Johnson against Jim Jeffries, the original "great white hope." Jeffries had been called out of retirement to re-enthrone white supremacy at the pinnacle of the boxing world. But it was not to be. Under a clear sky in Reno, Nevada, the "last great prize ring battle of heavyweights in the United States" was a mismatch from the opening bell.[1] Johnson quickly established his dominance and Jeffries bowed out in the fifteenth round. Johnson retained the title until a series of imbroglios with the federal government led to his exile in 1913. Historians have told and retold this story, including the widely viewed PBS documentary, *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson*.[2] Perhaps it was

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[1] "Fight Day Dawns On Roped Arena," *Deseret News*, July 4, 1910.

[2] The best biography of Johnson remains Randy Roberts, *Papa Jack: Jack Johnson and the Era of White Hopes* (New York: Free Press, 1983). Other treatments of Johnson's life examine the Jeffries fight in detail. See Finis Farr, *Black Champion: The Life and Times of Jack Johnson* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964); Al-Tony Gilmore, *Bad Nigger! The National Impact of Jack Johnson* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1975); Robert Greenwood, *The Prize Fight of the Century* (Reno: Jack Bacon & Company, 2004); Thomas R. Hietala, *The Fight of the Century: Jack Johnson, Joe Louis, and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Armonk, NY:

the "fight of the century," but the fight spawned other stories that extend well beyond the hastily assembled ring in Reno.

About five hundred miles east of "the biggest little city in the world," local boosters in Salt Lake City viewed the fight as an opportunity to display their city in a way that would attract tourism and invite capital investment from outside the Intermountain West. By hosting the "greatest boxing contest in pugilistic history," the *Salt Lake Tribune* reasoned, the city would become the "center of the world" in the months leading up to the fight.[3] For a time, Saltair, the resort on the Great Salt Lake, remained in the running to stage the fight. History, however, passed right by on its way to Reno. But the excitement surrounding the fight—likened to an invasion—laid bare social and political tensions, racial conflict, and created unlikely partnerships in Salt Lake City. While all eyes focused on Reno, events in Utah's capital city showed how attitudes about prizefighting reflected the social realities of life in the city. Unexpectedly, the most telling competition in the battle to secure the fight was not between Salt Lake City and other cities but was within Salt Lake City itself. Prizefighting became a pawn in the struggle between fierce rivals—political, racial, religious, and social—who espoused differing visions of the city's future. Though Salt Lake City failed in its bid to host the heavyweight championship, a form of urban combat played out in the pages of local papers and on city streets. The hulking heavyweights in the ring faded into the background as civic adversaries competed to shape the future of Salt Lake City.

Political and cultural differences in Salt Lake City coalesced around the Johnson-Jeffries fight and prizefighting generally. In the months leading up to the title fight, boxing received unprecedented attention in the city's daily newspapers. Editorials excoriating the sport as immoral and unjustified used boxing as a symbol of a larger rift. In short, support of boxing became associated with the American Party (a coalition of anti-Mormon ministers, businessmen, and professionals that had taken control of the Salt Lake City municipal government in 1905) and the unrestrained pursuit of economic growth. Those who denounced the sport implicitly criticized the direction of local government in favor of a more moral-based regulatory system.[4] Moreover, two other local issues—race relations and civic boosterism—were bound up in the symbol of prizefighting. The heavyweight title fight may have been on the lips of civic reformers, but their hearts were set on controlling the future of Salt Lake City.

The story of the Johnson-Jeffries fight and Salt Lake City begins well

M.E. Sharpe, 2002). Jack Johnson describes the fight in his own words in *Jack Johnson is a Dandy: An Autobiography* (New York: Chelsea House, 1969).

[3] "G.L. 'Tex' Rickard, A Prominent Promoter," *Salt Lake Tribune*, January 22, 1910.

[4] For more on the American Party, see Thomas G. Alexander and James B. Allen, *Mormons & Gentiles: A History of Salt Lake City* (Boulder, CO: Pruett Publishing Co., 1984), 140-61; and Reuben Joseph Snow, "The American Party in Utah: A Study of Political Party Struggles During the Early Years of Statehood" (M.A. thesis, University of Utah, 1964).

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James J. Jeffries arrives at the Union Pacific Railroad Station in Salt Lake City, January 22, 1910.

before the bout. Johnson had captured the heavyweight crown in December 1908, by defeating the undistinguished champion Tommy Burns in Sydney, Australia. Eight months later, as part of an exhibition tour, Johnson spent several days in Salt Lake City and it didn't take long for the black champion to make an impression. The city's fight fans knew that a Johnson-Jeffries match was being organized and they relished the opportunity to size up Johnson's skill and fitness. African Americans planned to celebrate their champion and entertain him in high style.

Wherever Jack Johnson traveled, a whirlwind followed. Salt Lake City was no different. As the "idol of the sons of Africa," Johnson received treatment reserved for a conquering hero.[5] Nearly half of the eight hundred African Americans in the county met Johnson's train and greeted the occasion "like the return of the victorious athletes of Greece in the olden days."[6] As the guest of "Salt Lake's darktown," Johnson hired an automobile and raced through the streets of the city, umpired an interracial baseball game between the African American Occidentals and the white Independents, and socialized into the early morning hours.[7] Salt Lake City's

[5] "Tonight is the Big Exhibition," *Herald-Republican*, August 18, 1909.

[6] "Jack Johnson Comes Tonight," *Herald-Republican*, August 16, 1909.

[7] This phrase is used in "Shows Class as Umpire," *Herald-Republican*, August 20, 1909. For more on the history of African Americans in Utah, see Ronald Gerald Coleman, "A History of Blacks in Utah, 1825-

black community momentarily took center stage in the city. The bottom rail was on top this time—at least until Johnson tried to check into the Orpheum Hotel. After booking the room in advance, Johnson presented himself at 3:00 a. m. and requested his room key. He was "politely informed," reported the *Herald-Republican*, "that the house did not cater to colored trade." Ordered from the premises, the champion walked to the police station and sought redress. The police refused to help.[8] This was the first time that Johnson had been turned away from a hotel after his reservation had been accepted. The champion spent the remainder of his stay in the home of William Russel, a well-known African American. Within two days of the incident, Johnson filed suit in the district court, seeking twenty thousand dollars in damages.[9] Even the heavyweight champion of the world fell victim to the power of some local customs.

Though Johnson won many admirers for his pugilistic skills and personality, the champion's color never receded very far into the background. "Like the crest of a great brown wave sucking after it innumerable pebbles," wrote one sportswriter, "something struck the office of the *Herald-Republican* last night. It was Arthur Jack Johnson, champion heavyweight pugilist of the world." An irrepressible raconteur, Johnson captivated his audience. Expecting the champion to "act like a 'bear'," sportswriters and fight fans alike were impressed by his good-natured grin and willingness to talk about himself and his plans.[10] The highlight of Johnson's stay was a four-round exhibition match held in the Salt Palace and attended by twenty-five hundred fans. Upon leaving the city, Johnson remarked, "I have certainly enjoyed myself" and "have nothing but well wishes to take away over my reception and treatment from the white people, as well as from my own people, and I hope that I have made some friends."[11] His stature already assured among African Americans, Johnson charmed some white fans during his visit. In its final analysis, the *Herald-Republican* concluded that Johnson "wasn't a bad unbleached American" and praised him as a "pretty white coon."[12]

Johnson may have impressed some Salt Lakers, but that didn't mean that most white residents were comfortable living under the reign of a black heavyweight champion. It was one thing to size up Johnson's chances

1910" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Utah, 1980). The African American presence in Salt Lake City politics is detailed in Jeffrey Nichols, "'The Boss of the White Slaves': R. Bruce Johnson and African American Political Power in Utah at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 74 (Fall 2006): 349-64.

[8] "Jack Johnson, Pugilist, Has No Place to Sleep," *Herald-Republican*, August 17, 1909. William Russel charged three dollars a day "because Johnson eats more than several ordinary men." For more on Johnson's umpiring and the Occidentals, see Miriam B. Murphy, "The Black Baseball Heroes of '09," *Beehive History* 7 (1981): 25-27.

[9] "Negro Sues to Recover $20,000 For Being Ousted from Local Hotel," *Herald-Republican*, August 19, 1909.

[10] "Big Black Man Has Confidence," *Herald-Republican*, August 17,1909.

[11] "Big Crowd Sees Johnson Leave," *Herald-Republican*, August 20,1909.

[12] Ibid., and "Tonight is the Big Exhibition," *Herald-Republican*, August 18,1909.

against Jeffries and quite another to cheer for the black champion in the ring. In fact, the smoke from Johnson's westbound train was still swirling when the *Herald-Republican* called on Jim Jeffries to move from Great White Hope to reality. In an editorial cartoon entitled "A Job for Dr. Jeffries," a beefy man with a white globe for a head calls on "Dr. Jeffries" to cure him of "a sore black head on my head." On the globe is a small depiction of a Sambo-like character named Johnson. "But will the physician be able to handle the case?" read the caption. Johnson blemished the world with his title and Jeffries needed to redeem the championship and return the heavyweight crown to its rightful owner.[13] Dethroning Johnson, while necessary to restore boxing's racial order, would not be easy. Placing the weight of the white world on his shoulders, the cartoon implored the former champion to return to the ring.

While whites awaited redemption, the contest to host the title fight began in earnest and Salt Lake City raced into the fray. Then, as now, sports were seen as an opportunity to advertise a city's attractions and invite fans to visit. Prize fighting may have had a mixed reputation, but the chance to host tens of thousands of visitors who needed lodging, meals, and entertainment motivated city leaders and business men throughout the West. To secure the fight, cities had to prove to promoter George L. "Tex" Rickard that politicians would not stand in the way of the fight and that concessions would be granted for the building of a new arena that would hold thousands of eager ticket buyers. At one point or another in the negotiation process, San Francisco, Oakland, Los Angeles, Reno, Goldfield and Ely, Nevada, and Salt Lake City made offers to Rickard. The situation took months to sort out.[14]

Under the leadership of sporting editor W. D. "Bill" Rishel, the *Herald-Republican* promoted the fight game tirelessly while Rishel worked behind the scenes to bring the heavyweight title match to Salt Lake City.[15] Rishel himself was a boxer who had sparred with Jeffries, Johnson, Bob Fitzsimmons, and Jim Corbett. Not a professional fighter, Rishel boxed for exercise. He was also a civic booster who understood the drawing power of sports and their potential to turn a run-of-the-mill town into a major league city. Rishel believed that it was "a sporting editor's duty to his paper and his town" to land the fight for Salt Lake City if for no other reason

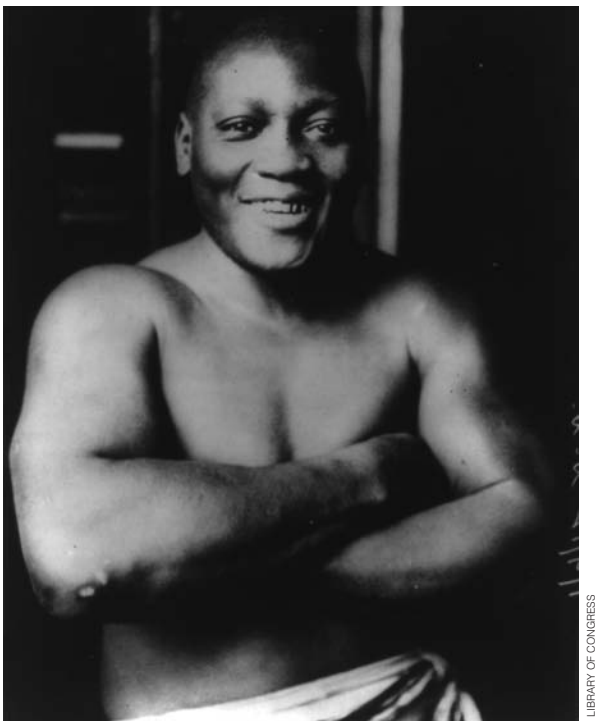
[13] "A Job for Dr. Jeffries," *Herald-Republican*, August 21,1909.

[14] For more on Rickard's exploits, see Charles Samuels, *The Magnificent Rube: The Life and Gaudy Times of Tex Rickard* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1957).

[15] For Rishel's version of the events, see Virginia Rishel, ed., "The Rise of Tex Rickard as a Fight Promoter," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 55 (Fall 1987): 340-48. Rishel not only promoted Salt Lake City but was also one of the early proponents of the "See America First" movement, which worked to develop the tourist infrastructure of the Intermountain West and stimulate domestic travel in the United States. See Marguerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 26-39, 148. Some of Rishel's boosting activities are chronicled in Virginia Rishel, *Wheels to Adventure: Bill Rishel's Western Routes* (Salt Lake City: Howe Brothers, 1983).

than "the publicity it would have given the old town."[16]

Boxing promoter Jack Gleason paired with Rickard to organize the Johnson-Jeffries match. It was no easy task to stage an event of this magnitude. Prize fighting was illegal in every state except Nevada, although major bouts had recently been held in California. The promoters worked together to secure a site, but they brought different interests to the table. Gleason favored northern California while Rickard initially argued for Salt Lake City and for a time became the city's biggest booster.



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Jack Johnson, heavy weight boxing champion, 1908-1915.

Salt Lakers seemed in the mood for boosting. Expanding in population, and shedding some of the provinciality that had characterized Mormon domination in the nineteenth century, the city stood poised to become a regional leader, if not a city of the first rank. Regionally, Salt Lake City competed directly with Denver, hoping one day to rival San Francisco. Civic boosters pulled no punches in promoting the city's potential. An editorial in the *Herald-Republican* championed the city in its plea for civic improvement: "Here in the city we need a little stronger sentiment of devotion to Salt Lake . . . This is and always must be the leading city of the mountain country. There is no vain chatter in the statement that Salt Lake will outstrip Denver in population, influence and wealth. Twenty years will demonstrate the fact." At times, the boosterism resembled playground braggadocio more than reasoned argument. "This is the best city," the editorial continued, "and the people of every other section of the United States must be made to understand that fact." The charge was clear—"we must . . . pray very earnestly for the power to hold our home city and our home state above all others wherever they may be; above them in every essential, above them in power and above them in desirability."[17] Hosting the Johnson-Jeffries match might persuade outsiders of the city's bright future.

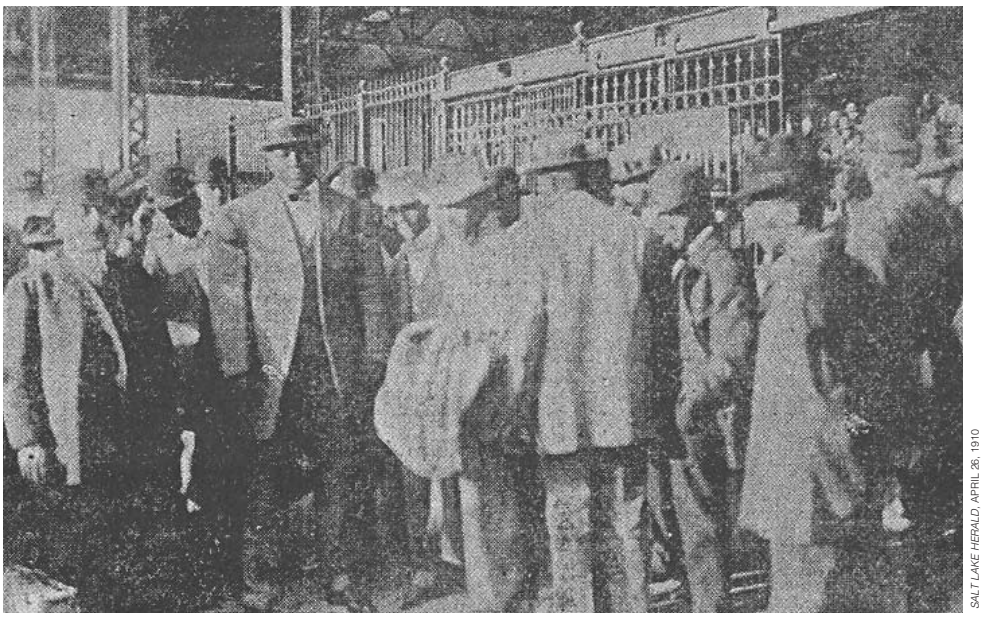
[16] Rishel, "Rise of Tex Rickard," 348.
[17] "What Do You Want for Christmas?" *Herald-Republican*, December 20,1909.

Fight fans in Boise, Idaho, saw the match as a potential boon for Salt Lake City and planned to attend the fight. "Salt Lake considers that the big fight is one of the greatest advertisements that city has ever secured and the business men there are enthusiastic" about the influx of fight-related visitors, asserted the Boise sporting crowd. "There is little question but what the advertisement feature will be an attraction and that Salt Lake next summer will be destined to become the Mecca of fans who are admirers of the pugilistic art." While California had hosted its share of title fights, "Utahans feel they are entitled to entertain world championship pugdom at least once in a century," concluded the report.[18] Residents of Denver, perhaps reflecting their view of the regional rivalry, scoffed at Salt Lake City's bid. Fight fans in that city envisaged the fight in California and thought Salt Lake City had "not the chance in a thousand" of hosting the bout.[19]

Tex Rickard agreed with the Boise fans and touted Salt Lake City as his first choice. On December 20, 1909, he told reporters in Chicago, "Take it from me, we are going to fight in Salt Lake City."[20] Rickard assumed the mantle of "Salt Lake booster" to convince local political officials to host the bout and induce boxing fans to attend the fight. On his visit to the city in late December 1909, Rickard's rhetoric dripped with salesmanship: "As an advertisement for Salt Lake, I found out from talking with people throughout the country, that any amount of dollars and cents cannot buy the advertisement the fight will bring to Salt Lake. . . [T]he [fighters] must be at the place of the fight at least ninety days before the [match]. That in itself will keep hundreds of men interested in the coming and going from the city." And the men who would visit were far from ordinary. Rather, "they were the right sort to bring to the city. They are all men of means, and they cannot help but bring money with them to spend and even to invest." Rickard finished with a bald-faced challenge to the striving city: "He says he has put Salt Lake up against San Francisco and hopes Salt Lake will win out."[21] To those boosting the city's future, winning a contest with San Francisco meant more than any heavyweight title. Perhaps Salt Lake City leaders could be cajoled to overlook anti-prize-fight laws in the service of the greater good of bringing attention to their city.

In private meetings, Bill Rishel had convinced Rickard that "Utah would stand for the fight" because the Salt Lake City "government was very liberal." Hoping to locate the fight in Salt Lake City, Rickard and Rishel met with state and local officials to sound out their interest. The Chamber of Commerce created a committee to support the plan, with A. Fred Wey, owner of the Wilson Hotel, as chairman. Rishel traveled with Rickard to New York where Johnson and Jeffries accepted Rickard's bid.

[18] "Boise Fans Are Glad," *Herald-Republican*, December 21,1909.
[19] "Denver Thinks Salt Lake Has Little Show," *Herald-Republican*, December 20, 1909.
[20] "Tex in Chicago Say Fight Will Come Here," *Herald-Republican*, December 21, 1909.
[21] "Rickard Comes to Offer Salt Lake First Chance at Fight," *Herald-Republican*, December 25, 1909.



SALT LAKE HERALD, APRIL 26, 1910

Five hundred boxing fans greet Jack Johnson at the Salt Lake City train station.

The contract stated the fight would take place in Utah, Nevada, or California. Rishel advised Rickard to insert the clause "in case something came up to prevent the fight being held in Salt Lake."[22] Having lived in Salt Lake City for nearly a decade, Rishel rightly anticipated the difficulty of getting city leaders on board.

Boxing committee chairman Fred Wey did not consider himself much of a sportsman, but he appreciated "the great interest . . . in athletic sports." Wey had traveled the previous year to Athens, Greece, where he marveled at the city's "big marble stadium" which could hold one hundred thousand spectators, nearly 80 percent of the local population. Upon his return, Wey led a coalition of bankers, manufacturers, real estate brokers, and attorneys in negotiations with Rickard. These civic boosters stressed the "benefits the city would reap in securing the big attraction" and assured Rickard that the "law would protect him."[23] The committee proposed to demolish the bicycle track at Saltair and extend the seating area, including the construction of two new balconies. The expanded stadium would accommodate forty thousand spectators.[24] The way seemed clear for the securing of the prizefight, a "big plum" for Wey and his committee.[25]

Rickard's proposal to put Salt Lake City on the pugilistic map met immediate resistance from the *Deseret News* (owned and operated by The

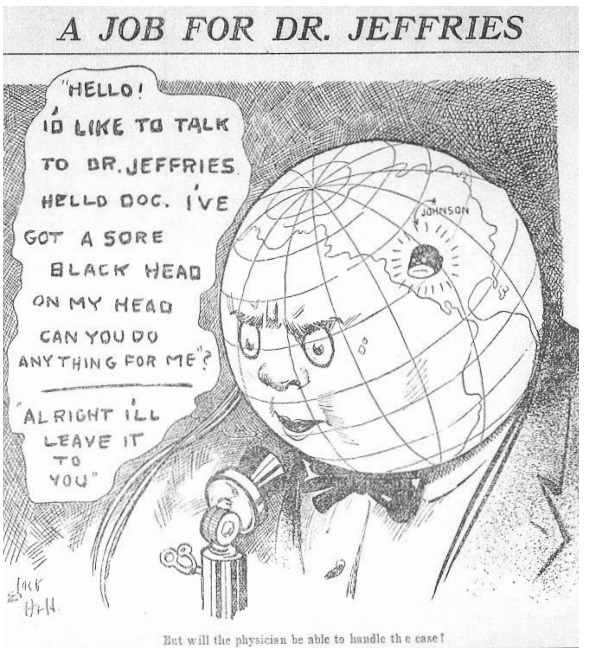
[22] Rishel, "Rise of Tex Rickard," 346, 348.
[23] "People Joyous Over Big Contest," *Salt Lake Tribune*, January 16, 1910.
[24] "Saltair Beach Gets Big Fight," *Salt Lake Tribune*, January 17, 1910.
[25] "People Joyous Over Big Contest," *Salt Lake Tribune,* January 16, 1910.

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) and religious leaders in the community. Prize fighting became a new front in the long-standing political battles in the city. The *Deseret News* wasted no time in laying out the contending sides. Regarding the fight, the *News* stood firm: "We want all the world to know that the Latter-day Saints do not approve of such affairs, and can have nothing to do with them." The church's position on prizefighting was expected. The editorial, though, linked prize-fights and other entertainments to the ruling American Party. The jab was not-so-veiled. "[S]aloons, gambling hells [*sic*], dens of infamy, horse racing, and prize fights are some of the 'civilizing' agencies that are forced upon our community by those who claim to be 'Americans' par excellence." The editorial then questioned the ability of the American Party to attract enough legitimate business to the city.[26] Churches consistently condemned prizefighting on moral grounds, but the church-owned paper made short work of the moral argument and turned straight to politics. Politics would remain at the center of the debate over prize fighting in the months leading to the Johnson-Jeffries match.

The anti-fight crowd had the law on its side. While boxing *exhibitions* (short fights, usually three or four rounds, displaying pugilistic skill rather than fighting for a title or money) were permitted, the law barred *prizefights* categorically. "The language of the statute is as plain as human speech can make it," the *Deseret News* claimed, that "every person who engages in, initiates, encourages, or promotes any ring or prize fight, or any other premeditated fight or contention, without deadly weapons, either as principal, aid, second, umpire, surgeon, or otherwise, is punishable by imprisonment."[27] Surely the Johnson-Jeffries match met the statute's requirements and the *Deseret News* maintained that many local boxing matches went beyond the realm of exhibitions. The *Salt Lake Tribune* weighed in on the side of sparring exhibitions and against prizefights: "As for boxing contests simply as a matter of exercise, of physical training, of drill in the endurance of punishment, and in the exercise of all the muscular power of the body, nothing can be finer than such an exhibit honestly and fairly conducted, not for gain and not attracting a lot of outlaws and outcasts as accompaniments. But the prizefight, as it has come to be conducted, is simply a farce from the standpoint of athletic support and of athletic prowess."[28] Of course, the question of when an exhibition morphed into a prizefight proved difficult to answer.

Beginning in December 1909, the *Deseret News* railed against the social malignancies associated with the ring. Boxing was bad enough, but the crowd that followed the sport was altogether undesirable. Fight promoters were not the only ones who could argue in hyperbole. Consider this editorial: "[Fight fans] hope to see something 'exciting' for their money

[26] "We Protest," *Deseret News*, December 27,1909.
[27] "We Protest Again," *Deseret News*, February 1, 1910.
[28] "Great Prize Fight," *Salt Lake Tribune,* January 18, 1910.



A Job for Dr. Jeffries, Cartoon that appeared in the Salt Lake Herald.

preferably a murder. Many of the crowds that travel thousands of miles and pay a high price to see a fight between human beings would do the same to see human beings burn at the stake, or be sacrificed and eaten by savages. They go to satisfy their morbid desires for excitement."[29] Prize-fights interested only the lowest elements of society—crowds of "plug-uglies" watching "male prostitutes that hammer one another for a prize." *Deseret News* editorialists repeatedly laid blame at the door of the American Party. "Synchronous with the so-called American regime," gamblers, thieves, saloon owners, and prostitutes had filled the city. Permitting prizefighting advertised the city "as a place where the laws can be broken with impunity" and had attracted "criminals from other parts of the country." Under American Party leadership, the city received the wrong kind of boost.[30]

Editorialists did not condemn all growth and change in the city, but they did evince a different vision of how the city should advertise itself. Air shows, auto shows, and even the 1915 World's Fair would bring positive attention to Salt Lake City and would appeal to upstanding citizens and families. The air show, for example, would "draw visitors from all over the Intermountain country. It would be a far better advertisement for our City than horse races and prize fights."[31] At stake was not just the future of the fight game in Salt Lake City but the very character of the city. Salt Lake City needed publicity to help it grow, but not all types of publicity were beneficial. Hosting the heavyweight championship bout would invite the wrong element into Salt Lake City. Victory in the competition to host the fight, the *Deseret News* averred, could only prove pyrrhic. "There has been a feeling in certain quarters," reported the paper, "that the Jeffries-Johnson bout would give the city much advertising, but with the far-sighted, sane

[29] "Protest by All Means," *Deseret News*, May 4, 1910.
[30] "The Right Kind of Boost," *Deseret News*, February 16, 1910.
[31] "Fetch the High Flyers," *Deseret News*, January 14, 1910. On the World's Fair, see "Why Not Salt Lake?" *Deseret News*, April 27, 1910.

business men, no matter what their personal inclination might be, there has ever been the feeling that a contest of this sort would not redound to anything creditable to the city which is to be the commercial metropolis of the intermountain west."[32] Economic growth promised a brighter future for the city, but only if it was controlled and measured. Growth at all costs would be disastrous; let other cities desperate for attention deal with the social problems caused by prizefighting.

In January 1910, Tex Rickard announced to Salt Lake City boosters that "the Jeffries-Johnson boxing contest for the championship of the world is yours; it will be held in Salt Lake City next July 4."[33] Wey and his comrades celebrated the decision and looked forward to the publicity that awaited the city. Their celebration did not last long. The day following the announcement, Utah Governor William Spry promised to call out the state militia if it was needed to stop the fight. Spry warned the promoters, "There is no use of these sporting men keeping up the talk of overthrowing the law in Utah. It would be absurd if a couple of fight promoters could nullify the law at their convenience. The law is against the fight, and we simply will not permit it."[34] By the middle of February, despite a flood of ticket applications, hotel reservations, and even the purchase of the lumber for the new arena, the tables had turned and Salt Lake City stood "not a chance" of hosting the bout.[35] Rickard had seemed genuinely interested in locating the championship fight in Salt Lake City, but he may well have been using the city as leverage in negotiations with San Francisco.[36] Eventually, after protracted dealings with political leaders in San Francisco, Rickard awarded the fight to Reno. A promise from Nevada Governor Denver S. Dickerson that no amount of reform pressure could sway his support carried the day.[37]

Back in Salt Lake City, the *Deseret News* delighted in the title fight's relocation, but the paper continued to sound the drum beat in the fight against local boxing. Other reform leaders joined in. Interdenominational relations in the city had thawed in the early twentieth century and the anti-boxing crusade found the once-warring religious groups in the same corner. On May 12, 1910, the *Deseret News* reported, "the war which has been waged fitfully against prizefighting in this city is taking definite shape."[38] Later that month, in a speech at the LDS Tabernacle, Catholic Reverend Dean Harris registered a "vigorous protest against the presence of women and children at the degrading exhibitions of naked men bruising and pounding each

[32] "Jeff and Johnson to San Francisco," *Deseret News*, February 10, 1910.

[33] "People Joyous Over Big Contest," *Salt Lake Tribune,* January 16, 1910.

[34] "Governor Spry Says He Will Not Allow Fight," *Salt Lake Tribune*, January 17, 1910.

[35] "Not a Chance for Big Title Fight," *Salt Lake Tribune*, February 9, 1910.

[36] Salt Lake City journalists had been more skeptical about Rickard's proposal and had questioned his motives at the time of the original announcement. See "The Great Prize Fight," *Salt Lake Tribune*, January 18, 1910.

[37] See Roberts, *Papa Jack*, 95.

[38] "Saltair Fight May Have a Sad Sequel," *Deseret News*, May 12, 1910.

other."[39] Reverend L.S. Bowman of the Baptist church attacked the evils of gambling and praised the efforts to keep prizefights out of the city.[40] In addition to religious-based censure, boxing had to fend off blows delivered by civic leaders. Members of the Boosters Club in the northern Utah town of Logan took "up arms against an invasion of 'pugs' in its city" by prohibiting fighter "Cyclone" Johnny Thompson from training in the organization's gymnasium.[41] Business leaders "fear[ed] that [Thompson's] appearance . . . would be the opening wedge of a campaign to introduce the boxing game in Logan."[42]

Despite the efforts of anti-boxing reformers, boxing in Salt Lake City maintained a loyal following. In 1910, boxing was king. Basketball was not yet twenty years old; professional football would not be taken seriously for another decade; baseball was America's pastime but the major leagues did not extend beyond the Mississippi and minor league baseball had not yet made its mark in Salt Lake City. Boxing news, both local and national, appeared in the sports pages daily and occasionally warranted the front page as well. The *Salt Lake Tribune* published a series of articles describing the modern history of prizefighting back to eighteenth-century England as well as a defense of the sport's merits written by a well-regarded local boxer and referee.[43] Local and regional pugilists fought in front of appreciative crowds in cities and towns throughout Utah. The Johnson-Jeffries match may have heightened interest in the sport but boxing had long been a staple of the local sports scene. Boxing fans represented a cross-section of Salt Lake City's population and proved "boxing even in a professional match is a popular sport even in Utah."[44]

The Manhattan Club, located at 147 Pierpont Street, hosted Salt Lake City's major fights and provided training facilities for the boxers. Every other week throughout 1910, fairly prominent boxers fought at the club. A typical Monday night slate might include five fights in various classes ranging from featherweight to light heavyweight. A limited coterie of boxers cycled through the club, though new fighters arrived in Salt Lake City with some regularity. Inter-racial matches, especially in the lower weight classes, were common enough to be unremarkable. The most anticipated matches were "battle royals" where five or so African-American boxers entered the ring simultaneously and the last one standing collected the pot.

[39] "Protest Against Prize-Fights," *Deseret News*, May 16, 1910.

[40] "Resort, Horse Races and Fights Arraigned," *Deseret News*, June 20, 1910.

[41] "Logan Takes Steps to Oust Pugilists," *Deseret News,* June 1, 1910.

[42] "'Cyclone' Thompson Passed Up By Logan," *Deseret News,* June 3, 1910.

[43] For examples, see "Tom Johnson's Great Fight," *Salt Lake Tribune*, February 13, 1910; "Rise of Mendoza, 'The Great Master,'" *Salt Lake Tribune*, February 20, 1910. Former Utah champ Willard Bean argued that the Marquis of Queensbury rules had developed "a scientific and practical field of sport" which had "eliminate[ed] the brutal and offensive elements" that had marked the sport in earlier times. See Bean, "Ex-Utah Champion Gives Some Facts," *Salt Lake Tribune*, January 14, 1910.

[44] "Utah Fight Fans Have Great Time in Discussing Ogden Boxing Bout," *Herald-Republican*, January 10,1910.

Watching black boxers pound on each other proved especially appealing to the predominantly white audience. These types of bouts reinforced racial stereotypes and, according to historian Randy Roberts, taught blacks that, "rewards came from defeating your brother, not from joining him."[45] An account of one Manhattan Club contest between "five burly negroes" reports that "the battle royal was a scream."[46] As many as five hundred fans attended the bi-weekly bouts. Eventually, the club moved to the Salt Palace to accommodate the expanding crowd. A second venue, the Salt Lake Athletic Club, located at 56 Richards Street, began holding bouts in June 1910.

Towns and cities throughout the state also hosted public matches including Ogden, Provo, Park City, and Morgan. When sought-after bouts were held in Ogden, hundreds of Salt Lake fans boarded specially scheduled fight-bound trains, which arrived in Ogden just before the opening bell and left thirty minutes after the last match. For one April 1910 bout, six hundred fans took the train and another one hundred traveled by automobile.[47] In July 1910, more than five hundred women in Provo watched Peanuts Sinclair pummel Young Erlenborn.[48] In addition to watching live fights, fans could view films of prominent title fights. In the same week that hundreds traveled to Ogden to watch a live fight, hundreds more, including hundreds of women, watched the moving pictures of the Bat Nelson-Ad Wolgast title fight in a Salt Lake City theater. The Ogden crowds packed the Bungalow Theatre's four daily showings for a week. More than fifteen hundred fans had stood outside the *Salt Lake Tribune*'s office on Main Street in the February cold to hear the telegraphed returns of the original match.[49] The *Herald-Republican* captured the spirit of the fight fans, "You can knock prize-fighting all you want, but you cannot make the sport unpopular."[50]

The most significant, and the most notorious, boxing bouts took place at Saltair, the premier resort on the Great Salt Lake, a short train ride from Salt Lake City. These well-publicized contests were clearly prizefights, which pitted professional boxers against each other and lasted well beyond four rounds. City and county officials aligned with the American Party, most notably county attorney Job Lyon, added to the controversy by refusing to get involved.

The first major fight held at Saltair nearly ended in tragedy. For weeks leading up to the May 13, 1910, bout between Pete Sullivan and "Cyclone" Thompson, the *Deseret News* excoriated attorney Lyon for allowing the fight. Lyon argued that he could do nothing to stop the scheduled bout

[45] Roberts, *Papa Jack*, 7.

[46] "Boxing Bouts at Manhattan Club," *Deseret News*, December 27, 1909; "Big Crowd Out for Manhattan Club Goes," *Herald-Republican*, December 28, 1909.

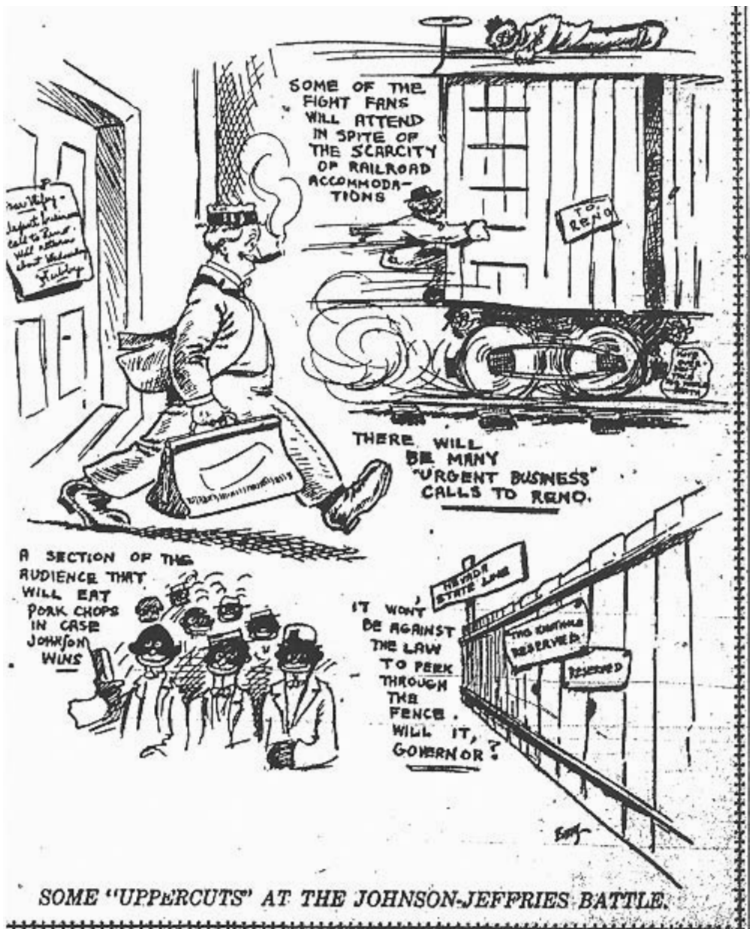
[47] "Featherweights Box Twenty-Six Round Draw," *Deseret News*, April 29, 1910.

[48] "Women See Brutal Fight at Provo," *Deseret News*, July 6,1910.

[49] "Large Crowd Hears Returns of Fight," *Salt Lake Tribune*, February 23, 1910.

[50] "Many See Pictures of Nelson-Wolgast Fight," *Herald-Republican*, April 25, 1910.

until he received a formal complaint from a citizen. County Sheriff Joseph C. Sharp, several deputies, and a deputy county attorney were dispatched to the fight to step in if "the law is being violated. If I think the 'boxing contest' is approaching a fight, I shall certainly stop it. There are going to be no fights in this county," pledged Sharp.[51] The *Deseret News* found cold comfort in the sheriff's promise and sheer duplicity in Lyon's hands-off approach. "It is . . . nonsense for the authorities who have sworn to maintain the law, to say that they are going to watch the performance closely and stop it, if the law is violated. That is a poor effort to sooth the conscience," read one editorial. Prizefights attract only "crowds of plug-uglies."[52] As it turned out, the fight crowd made the real news that night.



As this Salt Lake Tribune cartoon suggests, Utah boxing fans were eager to travel to Reno for the Johnson-Jeffries bout.

Nearly three thousand spectators jammed the resort that evening, including fifty women, prominent citizens, the city's chief of police, a county commissioner, and several city councilmen. A makeshift arena had been constructed on the resort's former hippodrome, which was suspended over a bicycle racetrack. The night's three bouts went off without a hitch. Frantic but brief action delighted the crowd and each match ended by knockout. The evening's main event concluded about 11 p.m., when battered Pete Sullivan crashed to the canvas. The referee's count unleashed a torrent of fans toward the doors, quickly packing the main staircase exit. Intent on catching the first train back to the city, members of the crowd had little warning before the timbers at the foot of the staircase gave way and

[51] "Prize Fight at Saltair Beach," *Deseret News*, May 11, 1910.
[52] "Stop Prize Fights," *Deseret News*, May 12, 1910.

"opened a gaping hole through which the waters of the lake could be seen." Dozens of fans tumbled into the water as pieces of the shattered staircase showered down around them. "Down in the water," according to one eyewitness, "there was a seething, scrambling mass, choking in the water, groping a way out or striving against the jumble of timbers." Fear that the entire building was sinking caused a momentary panic but calm prevailed as "temperate minds" grabbed hoses and ropes to rescue the victims. Remarkably, the most severe injury was a broken leg. Most got away with bruises, cuts, and the loss of personal items.[53] Fight promoter R. A. Grant settled with the victims who made claims against Saltair.[54] The fight itself was lost in the maelstrom. But the event forced the hand of local officials who scurried to ensure that order prevailed in the arena.

Within weeks of the Saltair debacle, American Party leaders and Salt Lake City's boxing promoters agreed to a program that would permit amateur prize fights of up to six rounds. Professional boxers were not allowed. The city's police chief, Sam Barlow, allotted two matches a month to the Manhattan and Salt Lake Athletic clubs.[55] "Glove contests bring into Salt Lake an undesirable element," warned the chief, "and the best way to get rid of that element is to reduce the frequency of the contests."[56] As for the county areas beyond the city limits, including Saltair, Sheriff Ward prohibited prizefights in June 1910.

The accident, however, did little to dampen the interest in boxing, even at Saltair. Just days after the disaster, promoter Grant announced a forthcoming fight between Thompson and Frank Pleato, to take place after the arena had been repaired.[58] People simply enjoyed boxing, whether taking in the fights at the Manhattan Club or Saltair, or following the preparations for the Johnson-Jeffries match. Regarding the forthcoming championship prizefight, the *Herald-Republican* explained that the sport's rise in popularity "is owing to the fact that a negro of more than ordinary ability as a fighter is champion of the world." The quest to regain white ownership of the belt stirred most white American men. Despite the fact that "most men agree that the prize ring is brutal . . . 99 per cent of them would travel to see this fight of fights pulled off." The draw bordered on the preternatural—it was "a sort of fever in the blood," the *Herald-Republican* described.[59]

Enthusiasm for boxing did not stop at the ring's edge; opportunities to

[53] "Seething Mass of Fight Fans Crashes Through Saltair Coliseum Floor Into Water of Lake, Barely Missing Death," *Herald-Republican*, May 13, 1910; see also "Three Thousand Men, Boys and Women See Prize Fights," *Deseret News*, May 13,1910, and "Many Fall into Lake, But All Escape Death," *Salt Lake Tribune*, May 13, 1910.

[54] See "Calm Follows Coliseum Panic," *Herald-Republican*, May 14, 1910, and "Grant to Pay for Saltair Accident," *Herald-Republican*, May 17, 1910.

[55] "Four Fast Fights—As Many Knockouts," *Deseret News*, June 3, 1910.

[56] "Chief Gives Notice to Two Fight Clubs," *Deseret News*, June 20, 1910.

[57] "Sheriff Puts Ban Upon Prize Fights," *Herald-Republican*, June 19, 1910.

[58] "Second Prize Fight Has Been Arranged," *Deseret News*, May 18, 1910.

[59] "Protest Probably in Vain," *Herald-Republican*, May 26, 1910.

enter the ring expanded as interest in professional boxing increased. It is important to remember that training, sparring, and even fighting in the ring did not trespass the law. In fact, acquiring pugilistic skills was one method to instill confidence and discipline in young men. In January 1910, the Salt Lake City police force established a gymnasium at its headquarters. Parallel and horizontal bars, jump ropes, wrestling mats, and the availability of shower baths pleased the members of the force, and the "fact that a set of boxing gloves may produce talent strong enough to go in the ring after 'Big Smoke' Johnson, should Jeffries fail, is also producing interest."[60]

Boxing aficionados at Salt Lake High School also established a boxing club dedicated to the "upbuilding of the manly art."[61] The club took several months to organize but by January 1910, so many students turned up at the after-school practices that not all could participate. On most afternoons, the mat "was strewn with boxers" training for their bouts under the direction of watchful physical education teachers.[62]

Visits to Salt Lake City by Jim Jeffries and Jack Johnson in the first half of 1910 further fed the fight fever. Jeffries arrived in January. The quiet former champion did little to excite his followers beyond staging a three-round exhibition match in front of a capacity crowd at the Colonial Theatre, located on Third South between Main and State streets. Jeffries laid low in Salt Lake City, even refusing to visit Saltair, before continuing on with his troupe to Ogden. Most of the fans who watched the exhibition found that "Jeffries [was] in a better condition than ha[d] been reported" and was in relatively good shape "for a man who ha[d] not done much training for many months."[63] Whites desperately wanted to believe that Jeffries could knock Johnson out, though his visit to Salt Lake City elicited no superlatives from the fans in his corner.

Three months later, and to much greater fanfare, Jack Johnson and his entourage arrived in town on April 25 and were met by a crowd of five hundred onlookers at the train station.[64] African American fans of the champ remembered Johnson's expulsion from the Orpheum Hotel on his last visit, and, therefore, scheduled activities and lodging that might put Salt Lake City in a better light. "The visit of Johnson will be made a gala occasion for the local people of his race," wrote the *Herald-Republican*, "and 'Darktown' will be on parade all the time."[65] Betting fans of all races wanted to get a last look at Johnson before he started training seriously for the title bout. Wherever he went, Salt Lake City included, Johnson was more than the heavyweight champion; he was the *black* heavyweight champion. During his four-round exhibition match at the Salt Lake Theatre, Johnson

[60] "Salt Lake 'Cops' to Fit Themselves for Athletics," *Herald-Republican*, January 8, 1910.
[61] "Want Wrestling and Boxing at High School," *Herald-Republican*, January 9, 1910.
[62] "Boxing at School," *Herald-Republican*, January 14, 1910.
[63] "Athletic Troupe Departs Today," *Deseret News*, January 24, 1910.
[64] "Johnson is Welcomed at Station," *Herald-Republican*, April 26, 1910.
[65] "Local Boxing Fans Will Size Up Jack Johnson Next Monday," *Herald-Republican*, April 6, 1910.

showed himself to be the "great big good-natured negro he is." Echoing long-held stereotypes about African Americans, some fans at the event complained that Johnson merely went through the motions and that he was "a bit lazy . . . [and] did not feel like exerting himself."[66] Johnson's black fans found little to complain about, however. Following the fight, dinner and dancing at the fashionable Dunbar Club feted Johnson late into the night. The next morning the champ toured the city in a rented automobile, visited Fort Douglas, and stopped for an organ recital at the LDS Tabernacle. The afternoon found Johnson in the Bungalow Theatre watching the moving pictures of the Nelson-Wolgast fight. Johnson won over admirers in Salt Lake City where about half of the bettors picked the champion to retain his title.[67]

The wallets of some white bettors may have sided with Johnson, but the hearts of white Salt Lake City clearly pulled for Jeffries. The *Herald-Republican* conveyed the community's hopes for the Great White challenger and their fear of his opponent: "While practically every Caucasian fan openly says, 'I hope Jeff will knock the black's block off,' at least half of them are afraid that he can't do it, and they will back Johnson to win."[68] It may have been commonplace for black and white fighters to toe the mark at the Manhattan Club, but the heavyweight championship bespoke racial superiority, and Johnson was the wrong color. Emotions ran high as the fight date drew near. One Salt Lake City minister's exclamation that he hoped "Jeffries knocks the block off that coon" indicated the racial divide in the city.[69] Many men in town admitted to having wagered on Jeffries because "a white man can whip a nigger any day of the week."[70]

Whites in Salt Lake City joined a chorus of white former boxers, sports journalists, and commentators who hyped Jeffries' chances by disparaging Johnson's skills, often employing racist logic to make their point. Editorial writers at the *Herald-Republican* called the detractors on the carpet explaining: "there is more than a suspicion that that portion of the sporting world which wants Jeffries to win is afraid of Johnson." Sports writers and others at the paper had been enamored of Johnson since he charmed them during his first visit to Salt Lake City in August 1909. The newspapermen saw right through the bluffing bravado. Those who called Johnson "a coward, a quitter, a clumsy fellow" and venerated Jeffries as "an unconquerable giant, with invincible spirit and unmatchable prowess" were peddling a "sort of rot." Settle the score in the ring where the best man would win. "Let pencil pushers and crumb pickers from championship tables be fair enough to give the colored man an even chance," advised one April 1910 newspaper editorial. Though racial divisions pervaded daily life, skin color should

[66] "Big Crowd Sizes Up Jack Johnson," *Herald-Republican*, April 26 ,1910.
[67] "Jack Johnson Enjoyed His Visit Here," *Herald-Republican*, April 27, 1910.
[68] Ibid.
[69] "Salt Lake Sends Crowds to Reno," *Herald-Republican*, July 4, 1910.
[70] "News from Reno and Its Effect," *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 5, 1910.

make no difference in the egalitarian ring where superior merit and skill carried the day—at least on the pages of the *Herald-Republican*.[71]

As the date for the big fight in Reno neared, interest among Salt Lake City residents intensified. By April, "Wherever sporting men congregate nowadays the Jeffries-Johnson fight is the chief topic of discussion," reported the *Deseret News*.[72] On the eve of the bout, "the fight bug ha[d] infected all classes of society, the rich, the poor and those betwixt and between. Will the boilermaker [Jeffries] win or will the victory go to the negro? That's the question of the hour, and until it is decided business in the ordinary channels of trade will not be resumed. Hasten the Fourth of July!," wrote the *Herald-Republican*.[73]

Several hundred residents of Salt Lake City planned to make the trip to Reno on specially scheduled trains, including two teenage boys who tried to "tramp" their way to the fight. The mother of one of the boys, frantic over his absence, contacted the police who reached the boy's uncle in Ogden. Uncle Thomas Williams made his way to the rail yard where "he seized the snoozing miscreants as they were about to leave on a box car" headed for Reno.[74] Some fans never made it that far, but not for lack of trying. Determined to view the fight but short of funds, local boxer Robert "Kid" Temple "vowed that he would attend the fight if he had to hold up some one." Instead, he cashed two forged checks at local saloons and was immediately incarcerated. When he realized that he would miss the fight, Temple attempted suicide by swallowing several strychnine tablets that he had hidden in his coat collar.[75] Temple's case of fight sickness may have been extreme, but according to the *Herald-Republican*, he was "only a little worse afflicted than the rest of us at this particular juncture."[76]

Interested Salt Lake City residents who did not make the trip to Reno had several options to receive news of the fight, virtually as it happened. The city's newspapers installed special telegraphic wires that kept the fans posted after every round. Crowds assembled outside the *Herald-Republican* and *Salt Lake Tribune* offices to hear the updates. Nearly ten thousand fans lined up outside the *Herald-Republican* office to listen to the results as one of the newspaper reporters yelled through a megaphone from a second-story window. The "mass of sweltering humanity" represented more than 10 percent of the city's population.[77] The announcement that "Johnson wins in the fifteenth round…fell like a pall, and save for a few cheers here and there, all was silent. The mighty Jeffries had been conquered by a

[71] "Are They Afraid of the Negro?" *Herald-Republican*, April 1, 1910.

[72] "Jeffries-Johnson Mill Discussed," *Deseret News*, April 7, 1910.

[73] "Prize Fight Craze," *Herald-Republican*, July 2, 1910.

[74] "Three Hundred Fans Going to the Fight," and "Young Fight Fans Are Brought Home," *Deseret News,* July 2, 1910.

[75] "Would Rather Die than Miss Fight," *Herald-Republican*, July 1, 1910.

[76] "Prize Fight Craze," *Herald-Republican,* July 2, 1910.

[77] "Prize Fight Bulletins," *Herald-Republican*, July 3, 1910; "Bulletins Heard by Ten Thousand," *Herald-Republican*, July 5, 1910.

negro. The result was anything but what the crowd wanted to hear, for it was a white man's crowd." Several African Americans had joined the throng, though they reacted quietly to Johnson's victory. "They made no outward show of their delight," reported the *Herald-Republican*, "no matter how much they were inwardly tickled." The crowd understood the implications of the event. When Johnson felled Jeffries, "The negro was the white man's master."[78]

Black Salt Lake City residents might have celebrated cautiously amid the ten thousand, but the scene was much louder at the Douglas Club on Edison Street later that night. Johnson's victory was praised in toast and every aspect of the champion's performance and style was honored. After hoisting a few drinks, about twenty of the celebrants locked arms and paraded down Second South Street. Jubilant, the parade continued toward State Street until it encountered a group of white citizens who were less than thrilled. The blacks bolted back to the safety of the Douglas Club. There, men promised that all black baby boys born before Christmas would carry Johnson's name. In the vein of festive hyperbole unleashed by the victory, "it was suggested that Jack Johnson was the redeemer of the black race and was destined to lead the colored folk back into some kind of a colored Palestine." In Salt Lake City and thousands of other locations, overjoyed African Americans crowned Jack Johnson the "king of the black race."[79]

The major news story following the title fight centered on the race riots breaking out across the country. New York, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and scores of other towns and cities saw supporters of both fighters take the battle to the streets. Utah fared better, but a handful of riots marred the cities of the Wasatch front. In Ogden's Hermitage Hotel, a "small race riot" ensued after "a gleeful Negro" heard the news and "sprang into the crowd shouting it out joyfully." The celebration was short-lived, however, stopped cold by a "right-arm punch from a burly Irishman." "Officials" intervened to quell further violence.[80] A more serious argument turned into a "small-sized riot" between two blacks and a crowd of newsboys in the alley behind a saloon on Second South Street in Salt Lake City. The groups threw broken bottles at each other until the police arrived and arrested the two black men.[81] The racial order of the boxing ring may have been disrupted but the streets of Salt Lake City still belonged to whites.

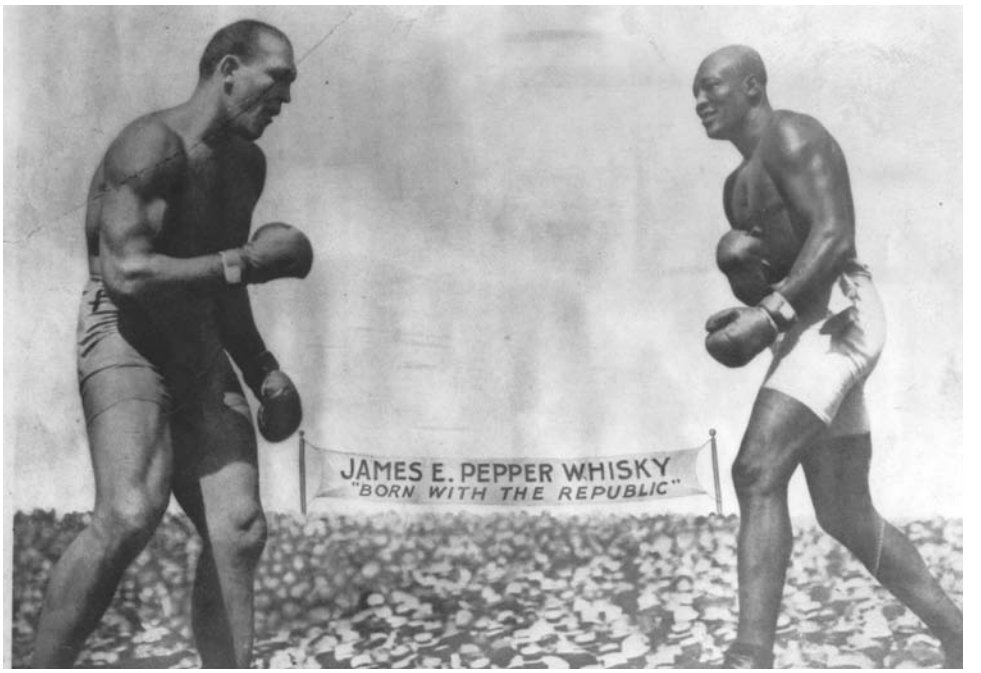
On his way home to Chicago following the fight, Jack Johnson briefly passed through Ogden where his eastbound train paused at the station for

[78] "Bulletins Heard by Ten Thousand," *Herald-Republican,* July 5, 1910.

[79] "Negroes of Salt Lake Full of Joy," *Herald-Republican*, July 5, 1910. In addition to Johnson's victory as a statement of racial equality, blacks could also celebrate their monetary winnings. The newspaper reported that, "Many of the colored residents of Commercial street pooled their money and are said to have won heavily on their champion." See "Brisk Betting on Big Fight; Colored Population Winners," *Herald-Republican*, July 5, 1910.

[80] "Johnson Enthusiast is Stopped by Irishman," *Herald-Republican*, July 5, 1910.

[81] "Pistol Made Them Stop," *Deseret News*, July 6, 1910; "Incipient Riot Caused by Boasts About Fight," *Herald-Republican*, July 6, 1910.



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Action during the fourteenth round of the Johnson-Jeffries bout.

about half an hour. In typical whistle-stop fashion, Johnson said a few words to the thousands who had come dressed "in finery in all its stages."[82] Johnson was smiling as he returned to his seat next to his wife and near an open window. "Three burly young toughs" approached the window and unleashed a vile epithet at the champion. Johnson rose from his seat but was restrained by a fellow traveler. The white ruffians then approached the train's platform where they were rebuffed by Johnson's trainers. One hooligan "was met with a kick from the foot of one of Johnson's trainers and a mouthful of tobacco juice full in the eyes." After the police regained control of the situation, the train roared out of Union Station drowning out threats of violence voiced by other angry onlookers.[83]

In the wake of Johnson's victory, the *Salt Lake Tribune* resurrected racist stereotypes to demean African Americans and reassure whites of their cultural, if not their fistic, dominance. The newspaper predicted a "chicken famine for the next two months" because "a colored person and a chicken are closely allied." Pork chops, according to the paper, would also be in short supply. "Now that the colored population has the wherewithal to indulge its desire, there is grave danger to the chicken and pork chop supply," argued the paper.[84]

[82] "Admiring Multitude Greets Jack Johnson," *Deseret News*, July 6, 1910.

[83] "Toughs Insult Johnson, Police Stop Mix-up," *Deseret News*, July 6, 1910; see also "Crowd at Ogden Jeers Johnson," *Herald-Republican*, July 6, 1910, and "Jeer Johnson at Ogden Depot," *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 6, 1910.

[84] "News from Reno," *Salt Lake Tribune* June 5, 1910.

Amid the racial tension, the *Herald-Republican* urged its readers to maintain calm. On the one hand, it reminded white readers that one boxing match could not re-orient the racial hierarchy. "There should be no thought of 'black supremacy' because Jack Johnson gave Jim Jeffries the thumping of his life," counseled one editorial. Be patient and recognize the limited fallout of the bout. The editorial concluded, "Those who feel impelled to crack the first negro over the head that comes along on account of the result at Reno, take the matter too seriously. Johnson will get his in due course of time."[85] Though the newspaper certainly took the fear of racial unrest seriously, it managed to find some humor in the overreaction surrounding the fight. The paper facetiously noted that the Johnson victory had been predicted in the stars. The first heavenly ill omen appeared in the return of Halley's comet. Then, shrouded by an eclipse, the moon turned black—foreboding that "something dire and dreadful" would soon befall the earth. "The catastrophe struck yesterday," reported the paper, "when a large black individual named Johnson pushed another large individual—a white man—over in the fifteenth spasm of their argument at Reno."[86]

Mark Twain and Jim Jeffries both went out with Halley's comet, and so, too, did much of the ardor for boxing in Salt Lake City. Interest streaked to its apogee with the promise of Jeffries re-establishing white dominance in the heavyweight division and fizzled out in the fifteenth round at Reno as the "Great White Hope" fell to the ground. Prize fighting in Salt Lake City took nearly the same tumble. Local fight fans, including the city's mayor John S. Bransford, had hardly stepped foot in the city before the reports of boxing's demise circulated. And they were not entirely exaggerated. The next scheduled bout, a benefit for injured local fighter Jack Downey, flopped. Sponsored by the Salt Lake Athletic Club, the bout failed to generate the seventy dollars needed to pay expenses. A hat was passed around to ensure that expenses were met. The *Deseret News*, long the leading opponent of local prize fighting, reported gleefully, "The prize fight game showed that it had been given the knockout punch last night . . . The card was given under the guise of a benefit but from all appearances it is up to the prize fighters to go to work or to seek a new pasture." Several fighters, including the African American Young Peter Jackson, "did not like the looks of the game here and will go elsewhere."[87] Dwindling in popularity, the fight game became a less salient symbol for civic and political leaders as other vices, especially prostitution, stepped in as the heavyweight issues that divided the city. Boxing in Utah was not dead, but the "invasion of prize fighting" had been halted.[88]

[85] "No Sense in It," *Herald-Republican*, July 6, 1910.

[86] "First Comet; Then Dark Moon; Then Jack Johnson," *Herald-Republican*, July 5, 1910.

[87] "Prize Fight Game Gets Knockout," *Deseret News*, July 8, 1910.

[88] For more on the politics of prostitution, see Jeffrey Nichols, *Prostitution, Polygamy, and Power: Salt Lake City, 1847-1918* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

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Salt Lake City boxers outside the Auditorium on Richards Street, 1911.

The tactic of using sports to create a community identity became commonplace in American cities and towns during the twentieth century. The boosters trying to lure the Johnson-Jeffries fight to Salt Lake City may have failed in the short term, but the turn toward sports forever altered the landscape. By the 1920s, professional sports—especially minor league baseball—had assumed a prominent place in Salt Lake City and by the end of the century, the city had won the rights to the 2002 Winter Olympics. The mix of political power and civic pride that helped land the Olympics would have made "Tex" Rickard smile. At last, Salt Lake had a sporting identity—or at least a slogan to lure skiers to local resorts.[89]

Sports and politics are never strangers and, in Salt Lake City in 1910, prize fighting became a symbol of political differences. Jack Johnson never fought in Salt Lake City, but the earthquake he unleashed in Reno sent tremors that shaped life in the city of the saints for years thereafter.

[89] For useful analysis of the 2002 Olympics and its impact on Salt Lake City, see Larry R. Gerlach, ed., *The Winter Olympics: From Chamonix to Salt Lake City* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2004), especially Lex Hemphill, "Salt Lake City 2002: XIXth Olympic Winter Games." See also Larry R. Gerlach, "The Mormon Games: Religion, Media, Cultural Politics, and the Salt Lake Winter Olympics," *Olympika: The International Journal of Olympic Studies XI* (2002): 1-52.